



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. AMEN

Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Last week in our text, we talked about LOVE. There are many ways in Scripture that Jesus taught us about His love. He also taught us to love one another as He loved us. Well, our text for today from the Gospel of John, tells of another gracious gift Jesus gave to the disciples and to us, peace, His peace. Verse 27 says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." Another wonderful gift, undeserved gift of His peace. WOW! It certainly sounds like Jesus' last will and testimony, doesn't it? And so, what do you think about this gift? Is it one that we take advantage of? Is it even possible to find peace in the world today.

What do you think? Yes, or no? Can there be true peace in the world in which we live. Well, I think that the answer is both yes and no. Our Lord himself said there would be wars and rumors of wars until He returns on the Last Day. An earthly, physical peace is impossible. But spiritually, our loving God graciously gives us peace for our troubled souls. It is this divine peace that we want to examine in today's verses.

When Leigh and Frank were little, they enjoyed having character pajamas. Frank had the cutest Superman jammies, blue with a big red and yellow S on the front and a snap on red cape in the back. Leigh Grace always wanted to be a fairy for Halloween. Give the child a cute dress, sparkles in her hair and a magic silver wand in her hand and she was in heaven. Remember those days?

There are some days that I would love to have that Superman cape and be able to solve any problem or to be ready in an instant to fight evil. I might not mind having a special wand to whisk away all the bad things in front of me. Do you feel like that sometimes? Needing a red cape or a magic wand to help with the ways of the world? Well, I believe that we all wish that at one time or another in our lives.

But I am here to tell you that you have something more important than any superhero figure can give. It is God's Peace. We are granted such a gracious gift in our Scripture text this morning.

These words of Jesus come as he is on his way to the cross. And the disciples are busy learning the last few things they will need when Jesus is gone. As you might imagine, the disciples are getting more than they seem to be able to handle. Most likely because they are fearful. They have walked around the Mediterranean for 3 years with this man and now he tells them he will be put to death. They have been his protection, their cape or wand if you will. Their sole thought and attention has been him since the day they were called to be his disciples. And now they are faced with the thought of life without him. Where is he going that they can't continue to follow him in the future? Surely, He will not be put to death as he has told them. But Jesus knows! His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, his trial and tortuous death the next day, will upset them.

Like a child lost in a department store, these disciples will be afraid, uncertain, confused, and nervous. Jesus knows as he tells them to not let their hearts be troubled. He also knows that they will survive his death, resurrection, and ascension. That is because Jesus has given them many instructions and gifts. And as our lesson from John says today, they are given the gift of peace. It is an unconditional peace, an eternal gift if you will. And Jesus gives it to everyone, to you and to me! That is why it is so different from the peace the world gives.

Worldly peace is conditional, fragile, temporary, and is frequently reduced to mean only the absence of war and strife. Worldly peace has some sort of strings attached, some kind of conditions. And worldly peace lasts only as long as the conditions are kept. Reminds me of my real estate career. The first thing about writing an offer to purchase on a property for someone is to make sure that all parties agree. Things the buyer wants need to be specified with an if, then statement. If you fix the roof, I will buy the house. And then all will be at peace with the deal. AH, but if not, then there will be a cancellation of the offer or worst-case scenario, a lawsuit. Do you agree that this is much like the rest of the world works? If you pay for your groceries, you can take them home to eat them. If you pay a fare, you can ride in the Uber. If you buy a ticket, you can see the movie. And boy, you know what happens if these simple rules are not followed and it surely isn't peaceful.

However, Christ's peace has no strings attached. It is a promise that is quite wonderful, one that will last forever. Peace, in the New Testament sense means: salvation, forgiveness and reconciliation between God and humanity. The sin that stands between God and us has been done away with by the death of Jesus on the cross and His amazing resurrection. We no longer fear God's anger because of our rebelliousness. Jesus reconciles us with God. He restores the friendship between God and man.

Also, peace is the Holy Spirit in our lives as friend, comforter, counsellor, teacher, and healer. Peace is knowing that no matter what troubles may come our way God, our heavenly Father, has promised to never forget us and to always be our guide. He sent his Son to do all the work by dying on the cross to claim us as his own. He won't give up on us now. We are his children, and just like a mother protects and loves her children, so will God love us.

Peace is also an ever-moving thing that flows through our lives as we live and work in the ordinary world. It will move into our relationship and our activities. It also will create a positive effect on our health and well-being. It is a fact that stress, tension, anxiety, and fear have negative effect on our bodies. So, what do we do when fear grips our hearts?

First, I think we need to remember what kind of God we have. He is gracious, loving, and faithful. We don't deserve his love, but he loves us anyway. He created us to be in relationship with him and he went to the cross to die for us. That is how much he loves us. God is powerful. He is the King of the Universe. There is nothing that he does not know. Not only is He powerful, but his power is special. It can save a young man by the name of Daniel from the lions. He can open the Red Sea to save the Israelites from the Egyptians. Saving Paul from a shipwreck, Jonah from the belly of a whale and Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego from a fiery furnace, were no problem. So, helping us when we are in trouble should be easy peasy.

Secondly, we need to learn God's promises and trust that He will stick to whatever He says. Scripture tells us that God keeps his promises and that He is with us always, even in the worst possible situations.

Thirdly, knowing our own weaknesses is important. We all like to think that we can do this life alone. But there are times when we become anxious when our own strength is not enough. I know that sometimes we feel like God is not listening to us or has deserted us. But even though it seems that way, the Holy Spirit is still with us to help us, to forgive us for our weakness of faith. He will help us to trust that God is faithful, even amongst our fears. He will help us get through even when we cannot figure it out on our own. This understanding is the "let go and let God" phenomenon.

I have found that there are times in life when my strength, my mind and my learned behavior are of no particular use. This week has given me the challenge of being concerned about my little sister. She is in the hospital again, third time in the last month. Seems no Dr. can figure out where her pain is coming from, and she now has pneumonia on top of her other infections and back issues. Her boyfriend and I commiserated on the phone three nights ago, for we are both fearful that her condition was life threatening. I feel some guilt that I cannot be with her as well. My head knows that I need to let go and ask God to help her. And if it is his will to do so, then it will be done. There is nothing I can do but to give my fear over to God asking him to walk with me and my sister during this time.

Martin Luther was in the tower when he read anew, the words of St Paul to the Romans, "Justified by faith, we have peace with God." It gave Luther inner peace and assurance of the Gospel and with it, launched the Reformation.

Fourth, is prayer. Boy did I do a lot of that this past week. Asking God to intervene in my troubles and make my fear subside. Pray for enough faith to see that our troubles are in His hands. Pray that we can hear the voice of the Holy Spirit who points us to the love and compassion of God. He promises to take our troubles of this world into the eternal world where there will be no more fear.

Knowing God is loving and kind, realizing that He keeps his promises, and is stronger than we are, we talk to him in prayer about our life situations, so we can then find peace.

We have often heard the words of Paul to the Philippians, "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Note that the peace that the Lord gives goes way beyond our human understanding. The Holy Spirit will continue to give us a bit more of that understanding as we need it.

Peace. Each person here this morning has his or her own idea of peace. Your dreams, hopes and experiences of what peace means might be different than the someone sitting next to you. But all of us long for peace of one sort or another. Every Sunday our liturgy concludes with the following words as we leave our worship service and enter the mission field of our world. "Go in peace", says the assisting minister and we respond with what our mission will be. "Remember the poor, share the Good News, Serve the Lord".

Jesus promises His peace for all who keep His word and love Him. What an awesome Lord we have. The world makes many, many promises. The world also breaks all of those promises. But God's peace is real, no capes or magic wands needed! The promises that our loving God makes, He keeps. There is peace for those who love God's teaching. There is peace only by the help and the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit provides faith to appreciate and accept God's peace! Turn to the Lord and his word in all of your struggles. And I pray that you will come to know His peace. AMEN

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